

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY ASUNCION

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4088

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C O N F I D E N T I A L ASUNCION 5277

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, PA

SUBJECT: CHURCH-STATE FRICTION FLARES ANEW

REF: ASUNCION 5048

1. ASUNCION ARCHBISHOP ISMAEL ROLON ISSUED A VIGOROUS AND PUBLIC ATTACK AGAINST THE ADMINISTRATION OF PRESIDENT STROESSNER ON DECEMBER 25 ALLEGING VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS, CORRUPTION, AND ABUSE OF POWER. IN A REFERENCE TO THE TERRORIST PLOT UNCOVERED IN NOVMEBER, ARCHBISHOP ROLON CHARGED THAT "REPORTS OF A THWARTED PLOT OF UNKNOWN DIMENSIONS" HAD BEEN FOLLOWED BY VIOLENT REPRESSION BY THE AUTHORITIES AND THE USE OF TORTURE AS A "NORMAL" MEANS OF INTERROGATION. HE ACKNOWLEDGED THE RIGHT OF THE GOP TO TAKE SECURITY MEASURES AGAINST TERRORISM, BUT ACCUSED IT OF ABUSE OF POWER AND VIOLATION OF PARAGUAYAN LAWS REGARDING THE RIGHTS OF THE ACCUSED AND PROHIBITION OF TORTURE. HE ALSO SUGGESTED THE REGIME EXPLORE THE CAUSES OF PLOTS AGAINST IT AND INDICATED THESE WERE DUE TO CORRPUTION IN GOVERNMENT, INCITEMENT TO HATRED AGAINST ITS POLITICAL ENEMIES BY THE RULING COLORADO PARTY, AND AMANIPULATION OF JUSTICE IN FAVOR OF SPECIAL INTERESTS. HE PLEDGED THAT THE CHURCH WOULD CONTINUE TO FULFILL ITS RESPONSIBILITY TO "PROCLAIM THE TRUTH AND DEFEND JUSTICE" AND CLOSED HIS SERMON WITH A PLEA FOR CLEMENCY FOR POLITICAL PRISONERS.

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2. THE ARCHBISHOP'S BLAST AT THE ADMINISTRATION WAS PRINTED IN

THE INDEPENDENT "TRIBUNA" AND "ABC" SIDE BY SIDE WITH PRESIDENT STROESSNER'S ANNUAL CHRISTMAS MESSAGE WHICH WAS DELIVERED SEVERAL HOURS EARLIER. THE PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS WAS UNEXCEPTIONAL EXCEPT THAT IT DEVOTED MORE TIME THAN USUAL TO CONDEMNATION OF TERRORISM. THE PRESIDENT'S PLEDGE TO CONTINUE TO DEFEND THE PUBLIC PEACE (THE REGIME'S PROUDEST ACCOMPLISHMENT) WAS IN CONTRAST TO THE ARCHBISHOP'S STATEMENT THAT VIOLENCE (BY THE GOVERNMENT) WAS NEITHER APPROPRIATE FOR NOR CAPABLE OF CONSTRUCTING OR MAINTAINING STABLE INTERNAL PEACE.

3. COMMENT: THE ARCHBISHOP'S ATTACK WAS A COMPLETE ABOUT FACE FROM HIS CONCILIATORY SERMON LAST CHRISTMAS AND MARKS THE FIRST MAJOR BREAK IN PROGRESS TOWARD CHURCH/STATE RAPPROCHEMENT WHICH HAD BEEN UNDERWAY FOR THE PAST YEAR AND A HALF. IF THE GOP FOLLOWS ITS USUAL POLICY OF AVOIDING THE APPEARANCE OF SURRENDER TO PRESSURE, THE IMMEDIATE EFFECT OF THE ARCHBISHOP'S CHARGES MAY BE TO DIM PROSPECTS FOR EARLY RELEASE OF THOSE POLITICAL PRISONERS STILL HELD.
BRIGGS

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